

Session 8 (Part 1): The Bride and the Writings of Paul

I. An Overview of Two Bridal Passages in Paul's Writings

1. We will explore in this session the apostle Paul's writings about the bride of Christ.
 - a. Forerunner School students are aware that we have been analyzing different biblical passages which address the bride of Christ. In previous sessions, we looked at the bride in the book of Revelation (Revelation 2-3, 19:7-9, 19:11-21, 21-22) and the bride in Matthew 22, 24, and 25. We had a twofold objective in studying these passages. First, we answered the question of "will every believer be the eternal wife of Christ or only those who make themselves ready as a bride during their life"; and second we attempted to discover what do each of these passages teach us about the bride and the bride making herself ready.
 - b. In this session, we turn our attention to the writings of Paul to answer the same two questions. In doing this, we will refer to a number of passages written by Paul in support of his view about bridal readiness. Of importance to our understanding, some of these passages do not refer directly to the bride but do address Paul's exhortation to believers to be transformed in a way that would make them ready as a bride.
 - c. Initially, I was planning to answer both questions in one session; however, as I dug into the text I realized that I need two sessions. Therefore, Session 8 is presented in two parts.
 - d. With that introduction, let's look at the two passages in which Paul directly addresses the bride. The two passages in Paul's writings that most directly address believers as a bride for Christ are found in 2 Corinthians 11:2 and Ephesians 5:25-33. Let's begin our study by briefly exploring 2 Corinthians 11:2.
2. Second Corinthians 11:2 establishes the very important truth that believers are betrothed to Christ as His bride.
 - a. Second Corinthians 11:2 reads,

For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin (2 Cor. 11:2).
 - b. In this passage, Paul makes a very important point for our understanding of bridal theology. In this brief verse, Paul makes it clear that every born again believer is betrothed to Christ as His bride at the point of their salvation and remain as Christ's betrothed bride during their life. Likewise, this passage establishes the truth that the entire church is betrothed to Christ throughout the entire church age. You will remember from Session 2 that we spoke of the Jewish wedding system and how that relates to the bride of Christ. In that session, we made the point that a young Jewish couple during the time Christ walked the earth were betrothed for about a year before the consummation of the marriage and the celebration of the marriage supper. Drawing from that analogy, we made the point that believers are betrothed to Christ at the point they are born again and throughout

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their life and, in fact, throughout the entire church age the earthly church remains in a betrothal relationship with Christ.

- c. Therefore, this is a very important passage; and, in fact, is a critical passage in understanding a believer's bridal relationship to Christ. This passage is the most direct passage in the scriptures to explain this concept and states directly that born again believers are betrothed to Christ when they are born again.
- d. Even though this verse makes a very important theological statement for our understanding of the bride, Paul's point was not to present a truth about the bride. Rather, he was using this idea to bring correction to an issue that was present in the church at Corinth. Note the verse immediately following verse 2,

But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully. For I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles. But even if I am unskilled in speech, yet I am not so in knowledge; in fact, in every way we have made this evident to you in all things (2 Cor. 11:3-6).

- e. The context of the above passage is that following Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, the Corinthian church had been swayed by false teachers to accept a false belief system and to be stirred to reject Paul and his teachings. In the entire book of 2 Corinthians, Paul's objective was to defend his apostleship and his teaching. His primary objective was not to explain their bridal relationship with Christ; instead, it was a corrective word calling them out of deception and the following of false teachers so as to come back to the pursuit of the simplicity of devotion to Christ.
- f. Therefore, in verse 2, even though he states an essential truth for our study of bridal theology, his goal is not to explain bridal theology but to help the Corinthian church to return to the truth of the gospel which he had preached to them. The reason I include this explanation about this passage is that Paul has a similar objective in the primary passage we will consider in this session—Ephesians 5:25-33. Paul's goal in the Ephesians passage was not to say who is or who is not the bride but to cast a powerful vision for God's desire for the church as His bride.
- g. Let's next look at Ephesians 5. We will explore this passage from two perspectives like we have in previous sessions. First, we will answer the question about what it says about who is the bride of Christ, and, second, in Part 2 of this session we will analyze what it teaches us about our bridal relationship with Christ.

II. Answering the Question: Is Everyone the Bride in Ephesians 5

- 1. Ephesians 5 casts a powerful *vision* about the glorious bride to be presented to Christ at His second coming.
 - a. The passage we are considering reads,

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Eph. 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her,

26 so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,

27 that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.

28 So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself;

29 for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, 30 because we are members of His body.

31 FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH.

32 This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.

33 Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband (Eph. 5:25-33).

- b. This passage addresses both the relationship between a husband and wife and the relationship between Christ and His church. As I am sure you noted throughout the passage, Paul flows from husband and wife to Christ and His church. In his application of the passage to Christ and the church, he focuses on the church *as Christ's bride*.
- c. A cursory reading of this passage can easily lead to the belief that Paul is speaking about the entire church being the eternal wife of Christ. Several examples of why people might take this position are:
- The primary context of the passage is Christ and the church. Even though much of the passage focuses on the marriage relationship between a man and woman, Paul makes it clear that he is speaking primarily about Christ and the church (v. 32).
 - In describing the church, Paul uses the analogy of the bride suggesting that the entire church is the bride that will be presented to Christ at His second coming.
 - Drawing from his comparison of the church to Christ's bride, he states that Christ will present to Himself the church in all her glory having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless suggesting that the entire church will have these traits.
 - Many commentaries on the book of Ephesians explain chapter 5 in a way that suggests that the entire church will be presented to Christ at His coming as His bride. They make no distinction between the church and the bride made ready.
- d. Therefore, this passage at first glance appears to contradict our explanation of what Jesus spoke in the gospels and what John wrote in the book of Revelation. Whereas from our perspective those passages are clear in their position that the bride must make herself ready in order to become the

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eternal wife of Christ, this passage appears to state that the entire church will be the eternal wife of Christ.

- e. As you can imagine, we disagree with the idea that the entire church will be the eternal wife of Christ. Our explanation of why we believe this follows.
2. The explanation of our view begins with an understanding that Ephesians is the book in the bible which explains in the greatest detail God's eternal purpose—that is, His *vision* for His creation.
 - a. In the book of Ephesians, the apostle Paul takes us back prior to creation before the foundation of the world. He takes us back before there was a throne, before the angelic order was created, before man or any created thing existed. Paul takes us back to when there was only the Godhead to an eternal council when God's eternal plan was determined. The council meeting to which I refer is recorded in Ephesians 1:11. It states, "also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will..." (Eph. 1:11).
 - b. Several of our Forerunner School classes address God's eternal purpose in much greater detail than we can here. For our purposes in this session, we will focus on God's eternal purpose as it pertains to the bride. You can find out a lot more in our class, *The Eternal Blueprint*. Knowing that the entirety of Chapter 1 of Ephesians describes God's eternal purpose, Paul uses these words to explain God's eternal plan for mankind, "...just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him" (Eph. 1:4). In essence, this verse records an aspect of God's eternal purpose for His creation—to be holy and blameless before Christ. As you will notice, the phrase "holy and blameless" is repeated in Ephesians 5 in the context of the church as a bride. It reads,

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be *holy and blameless*" (Eph. 5:25-27).
 - c. Let's next look a little deeper at Ephesians 5. The context of Ephesians 5 that of a husband and wife, Christ and His church, and *the church as Christ's bride*. In the context of the church as Christ's bride, Paul is not describing who will be the bride; rather, he is explaining Christ's plan and purpose, that is, God's vision for the bride which will be presented to Christ at His second coming. We know from Chapter 1 that a holy and blameless church/bride is a major aspect of God's eternal plan—God's vision for the church—a plan which was established before the foundation of the world.

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3. Therefore, Ephesians 5 states God's eternal plan and purpose—that is, His vision—for the church to be a glorious bride without spot or wrinkle and to be holy and blameless.
 - a. In Ephesians 5, Paul is not writing that the entire church will actually be presented to Christ as His eternal wife; rather, he is writing specifically that it is God's desire and plan to present the entire church to Christ as His glorious bride.
 - b. Several phrases in the Ephesians 5 passage support the idea that Paul is writing about God's vision for the church rather than making a declarative statement that the entire church will be the bride presented to Christ. Several points Paul makes which support our view that this is God's vision rather than an absolute reality are as follows,
 - First, Paul uses the same phrase he used in Chapter 1 to describe the character traits God envisions for His people, that is, that they would be holy and blameless. As stated in Chapter 1, the eternal council of the Godhead determined that God would have a people who are holy and blameless. Chapter 5 records this same goal in a little more detail. Chapter 5 does not say this will happen in the life of every believer but that it is God's eternal purpose for it to take place.
 - Second, in a way similar to the first point, when Paul writes that Christ will present the church to Himself in all her glory, he is not saying that every individual believer will be presented to Him in the fullness of glory. Instead, he is writing that as a corporate body the church will be presented to Christ in great glory.
 - Third, Paul wrote that Christ “gave Himself up [*on the cross*] for her [*the church*]” so that the church could be sanctified. This suggests that the glorification of the church will not be automatic but the result of the church submitting to the sanctification process.
 - Fourth, the work of sanctification will take place as Christ washes believers with the water of the word. This phrase suggests that individual believers must be cleansed initially through salvation but also over their life by encountering the word of God and responding to it so that they may be made glorious as they are progressively washed by the word.
 - Fifth, Paul wrote that Christ so loves the church that He nourishes and cherishes the church. We will look at this in more detail later in the session, but for now know that the phrase nourishes and cherishes suggests an ongoing work of tender love and care directed toward sanctifying believers to bring them into maturity.
 - Sixth, the passage calls individual believers to live in subjection to Christ (Eph. 5:24) and to reverence Christ (Eph. 5:32-33). The call to submit to Christ in great reverence suggests individual responsibility on the part of believers to make themselves ready to be a part of the glorious vision Paul communicates in this chapter.

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4. Other parts of Ephesians support the idea that Ephesians 5 conveys God's plan and purpose for His bride not an absolute reality.

- a. In addition to the first eleven verses in the book which are directly related to explaining God's eternal purpose, there are several other passages which support the fact that chapter 5 expresses God's intent, plan, and purpose, not an absolute reality.
- b. First, Ephesians 1:16-19 records a prayer in which Paul prays for the church to receive deep revelation of God's plan and purpose so that believers can be filled with Christ unto fullness (Eph. 1:23). In this prayer, he prays for believers to get understanding of the hope of His eternal purpose; to get understanding of the great inheritance Christ will have in the saints as they make themselves ready as a bride and the mighty power directed toward His people to accomplish God's eternal purpose. In other words, Paul records this wonderful prayer so that believers can get understanding of the great mystery of God's eternal purpose—so that they can then pursue it.
- c. Second, Paul explains that his call is to enlighten the church about God's plan and purpose. He wrote,

To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and *to bring to light* for everyone what is *the plan of the mystery hidden for ages* in God who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him (Eph 3:8-12, ESV).

- d. In this passage, Paul wrote that he was called to bring enlightenment of the mystery of God's eternal purpose which had been hidden. John Stott writes the following about this passage, "The second part or stage of Paul's privileged ministry he expresses in these terms: to make all men see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things." Stott goes on to write that Paul's "preaching of the gospel is now defined not as to announce the good news but to enlighten.¹ My point is that once again Paul makes it clear he is writing about God's plan and purpose so as to enlighten people about it so they can pursue it.
- e. Third, a shift in the focus of the book takes place beginning with chapter 4. Ephesians 4:1 reads, "Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called" (Eph. 4:1). The calling he refers to is God's eternal purpose. In light of God's eternal purpose, he exhorts the Ephesian church to walk worthy of that calling. He then highlights a number of exhortations related to walking in obedience to God's plan. He calls the Ephesians to lay aside the old man and put on the new man (Eph. 4:22-24), to speak truth, overcome anger, not to steal, only speak words that edify, and not to grieve the Holy Spirit. Moving to chapter 5, he explains the proper order in marriage and in Chapter 6, he explains issues related to raising children, and the need to stand strong in spiritual warfare. The reason for highlighting these issues here is to make the point that Paul was calling the church to live in obedience to God in light of the great purpose God has for the church—so as to become a glorious bride for Christ.
- f. Other books written by Paul also support our premise that the bride must make herself ready. Let's look at a few instances of this.

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III. Other Writings of Paul Support this View

Paul's Prison Epistles

1. Paul's other letters written in the same time frame as Ephesians support the view that not every born again believer will be the eternal wife of Christ.
 - a. Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon are often referred to as the apostle Paul's prison epistles and were written during his first imprisonment in Rome in about AD 60-62 . Whereas Philemon is primarily a letter to Philemon of a personal nature, Colossians and Philippians offer insight into Paul's view about one making herself ready and is in agreement with what we have described about the bride in Ephesians. Since they were both written at about the same time as Ephesians, they provide valuable insight into Paul's view about being made ready as a bride.
 - b. Let's look first at Philippians. The primary passage in Philippians in support of the idea that Paul did not believe that every born again believer would be the eternal wife of Christ is recorded in Philippians 3. In chapter 3, Paul states his credentials as a Jewish leader but goes on to say that he counts all of that as loss for the sake of Christ (Phil. 3:1-7). In this context, he writes that he presses on to lay hold of that for which he was laid hold of by Christ. Further, he writes that he presses on toward the goal for the *prize* of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:10-14). In other words, Paul is making the point that no matter of his credentials, he had to pursue the goal of God's eternal purpose. He concludes this exhortation with these words, "Let us therefore, as many as are perfect [*mature*], have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you" (Phil. 3:15). Therefore, in these verses, Paul is exhorting believers to pursue maturity so that they might receive the prize associated with the high call of God in Christ.
 - c. Also in Philippians, Paul wrote,

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. Do all things without grumbling or disputing; so that you will *prove yourselves to be blameless* and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain (Philippians 2:12-16).
 - d. As this passage states, Paul calls on believers to work out their salvation with fear and trembling for the purpose of proving themselves to be blameless. Here he connects the need to pursue being blameless at the coming of Christ.
 - e. Let's look next at Colossians. Again, Paul's letter to the Colossians contains a theme of moving on to maturity. A few passages stand out to support this idea,

Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me (Col. 1:28-29, ESV).

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Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him (Col. 3:5-10).

For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light (Col. 1:9-12).

- f. As the above passages suggest, we see a similar idea in Colossians of Paul writing to believers to pursue maturity in order to be holy and blameless at Christ's return.
- g. In addition to Paul's prison epistles, his earlier letters also express a call to the pursuit of maturity, holiness, and readiness. Let's look at several passages beginning with 1 Corinthians.

Paul's Earlier Epistles

2. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul wrote of greatly differing levels of glory on resurrected saints.

- a. Speaking about the glory that will rest upon the bride as she is presented to Christ at His second coming, Ephesians 5:27 reads: "that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless."
- b. As we stated earlier, this statement appears to suggest that every believer will be presented to Christ at His second coming in the fullness of glory to the maximum extent possible. In other words, the above verse seems to suggest that the entire church will experience the same level of glory as it is presented to Christ at His second coming.
- c. However, Paul's first letter to the Corinthians communicates a different message. In chapter 15, Paul addresses a debate that was taking place in the Corinthian church about the resurrection from the dead. He wrote,

Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain (1 Cor. 15:12-14).

- d. He devotes the remainder of the chapter to a discussion of the resurrection of the dead. He speaks first of Christ's resurrection and its importance. Of particular interest to our discussion here, he then

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speaks of the resurrection of the saints. Included in the discussion is this verse, "But someone will say, 'How are the dead raised? *And with what kind of body do they come?*'" (1 Cor. 15:35).

- e. The following is Paul's answer to the italicized question,

All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one flesh of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another flesh of birds, and another of fish. There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the glory of the earthly is another. *There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead.* It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body (1 Cor. 15:39-44).

- f. Here, Paul explains that believers will receive a resurrected body at Christ's coming but that the glory on believers will vary greatly. Some will have a glorified body in comparison to the sun. Some in comparison to the moon, and others reflecting the glory of a star. He also notes that the glory on those characterized as reflecting the glory of a star varies greatly as do the brightness from star to star.
- g. Paul makes it clear in this passage that not every believer will be resurrected in an identical level of glory. Therefore, referring again to Ephesians when Paul wrote about the church being presented to Christ in all her glory, he is stating God's purpose being to present the entire church in the fullness of glory, but the reality being that individual believers will reflect greatly varying degrees of glory.
- h. Therefore, the glory upon individual believers will vary greatly from believer to believer depending upon how they lived their life.
3. Paul's descriptions of the judgment seat of Christ supports the idea of different levels of glory and reward.

- a. The following are two of Paul's most prominent descriptions of the judgment seat of Christ,

Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire (1 Cor. 3:12-15).

Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad (2 Cor. 5:9-10).

- b. Both of these passages communicate Paul's view that eternal rewards will vary greatly and, in fact, in the first of these passages, he states that some believers will have their works burned up and receive no reward. They will be saved through fire, but without reward.
- c. Again, we see evidence in Paul's writings that he does not believe that every believer will carry the same level of glory into eternity or receive the same reward at the judgment seat. Again, these

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passages support the idea that Paul does not believe that every believer will be equal in holiness or blamelessness.

4. Paul also wrote about the need for believers to pursue being clothed in garments of righteousness.

- a. We know from our previous sessions about the bride making herself ready that the scriptures speak about being clothed with bridal garments or clothed in righteous acts. As a reminder, note these verses we spoke of earlier,

But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw a man there who was not dressed in wedding clothes, and he said to him, "Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?" (Mt. 22:11-12).

Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready. It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints (Rev. 19:7-8).

- b. We also see references to bridal or white garments in Revelation 3:4, 5, and 18 and Revelation 19:14. From these references, we know that the scriptures draw upon the idea of being clothed, wearing white garments, putting on fine linen garments, etc. to describe the bride being made ready.
- c. Even though Paul does not make a direct connection between being clothed with Christ and being made ready as a bride as do the gospels and Revelation, Paul does draw regularly and heavily from the idea of being clothed with Christ and His character as an expectation of the Christian life.
- d. Note some of the passages from Paul's writings that speak about being clothed in this way as a description of being made ready for Christ's second coming,

For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven, inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked. For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed, so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life. Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge (2 Cor. 5:1-5).

But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts (Rom. 13:14).

...and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth (Eph. 4:24).

...and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him — a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all. So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. 14 Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity (Col. 3:10-15).

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- e. My point in presenting these verses is to say that even though Paul did not directly connect the idea of the bride making herself ready to being clothed with Christ and righteous character, he did speak regularly about the same idea of putting on or clothing oneself with garments of righteousness just like Jesus spoke in the gospels and John wrote in Revelation.
5. Paul used the idea of being crucified with Christ to describe how a believer is conformed into the image of Christ.
 - a. Galatians 2:20 reads, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me." Paul drew upon this idea in much of his writings to describe how a believer is made ready for Christ.
 - b. To discuss the details of this idea is far beyond what we can speak of here. However, our Forerunner School class, *The Indwelling Life of Christ* will go into much detail about the idea. Even so, this concept permeates Paul's writings as a way of explaining that believers must embrace the cross as a way of life to die to sin and self so as to live fully in and for Christ.
 - c. Again, Paul does not directly connect this concept to the bride making herself ready but these principles do show the believer how to make oneself ready as a bride for Christ.
 6. Paul writes that he himself could be disqualified from the high calling of God.
 - a. Paul wrote these words in 1 Corinthians 9:26-27,

Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified (1 Cor. 9:26-27).
 - b. The context of the above passage is Paul defending his ministry to the Corinthian church. In the verses preceding this statement, Paul wrote that he did not preach the gospel under compulsion but voluntarily (1 Cor. 9:16-17). A few verses later, he concludes his defense with these words, "I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it" (1 Cor. 9:23).
 - c. Finally, he writes that he disciplines his body to minister with one reason being so that he would not be disqualified. He was not concerned about losing his salvation. No! He was concerned that he would be disqualified from the high call of God, and, quite possibly, be disqualified from being the bride made ready.
 7. Summarizing, Paul was an apostolic teacher whose writings go into great detail about how to make oneself ready as a bride for Christ.
 - a. A powerful passage which describes Paul's ministry summarizes how he viewed the passage in Ephesians 5. Recorded in the book of Colossians, it reads,

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...Christ in you, the hope of glory. We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me (Col. 1:27-29).

- b. Remember from Ephesians 5:27, Paul wrote that Christ might present the church to Himself in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle and that she should be holy and blameless. The above passage gives a brief but very powerful description of how this can work—Christ in the believer in fullness. Christ in us in completeness is the hope of becoming the glorious bride.
- c. Paul's life goal was to labor for Christ with this goal to present every man and woman complete in Christ filled unto fullness with Christ. He labored to this end, enduring great hardship, opposition, persecution, and suffering.
- d. Therefore, we can say with confidence that Ephesians 5 does not in any way suggest that every believer will be the eternal wife of Christ but just like Jesus spoke and John wrote, it is the bride who makes herself ready who will be the eternal wife of Christ.
- e. Summarizing, the message of Ephesians is that before the foundation of the world, God laid out an eternal plan for mankind. In His eternal purpose, Christ is to have a bride holy and blameless in every way without spot or wrinkle. His bride who exhibits these traits will be presented to Christ in the greatest of glory. With this as God's purpose for His church, God is calling His church to come out of sin, self, and impurity so as to walk in a manner worthy of this great call.
- f. Although Paul's writings do not speak to the bride in as direct terms as Jesus did in the gospels or through the angelic messengers in the book of Revelation, Paul's writings most definitely communicate the same message of the bride needing to make herself ready.
- g. In Part 2 of this session, we will shift the emphasis of our discussion to discover some of the powerful truths from Ephesians 5.

ⁱ John Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, Inter Varsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 1979, p.121.